



A nonpartisan research and public policy office of the Connecticut General Assembly

Testimony of

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Connecticut Commission on Aging

Aging Committee

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Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to comment on two bills before you today.

As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is the nonpartisan state agency devoted to preparing Connecticut for a significantly changed demographic and enhancing the lives of the present and future generations of older adults. For seventeen years, the Commission has served as an effective leader in statewide efforts to promote choice, independence and dignity for Connecticut's older adults and persons with disabilities. I'd like to thank this committee for its ongoing leadership and collaboration in these efforts.

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed. The Connecticut Commission on Aging stands ready to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services.

Senate Bill 2: An Act Concerning Air Conditioning in Nursing Homes

~ CoA Informs

As you recall, this past summer brought record-setting heat and with it a heightened discussion on air conditioning in nursing homes. This is a key quality of life issue for Connecticut's 26,000 nursing home residents who are generally older and frail with diminished physical ability to regulate their internal temperature, putting them at a higher risk of overheating and heat stroke.

As a reminder, this quality of life issue has been addressed by the General Assembly; PA 03-272 required the state Department of Public Health to adopt recommendations for minimum and maximum temperatures for areas within nursing homes. The recommendations could be based upon standards set by national public or private entities after research into appropriate temperature settings to ensure the health and safety of the residents of such homes. Unfortunately, though a minimum temperature has been in place for years (75° F), DPH has yet to recommend a maximum temperature. Instead, it annually issues general recommendations and guidelines nursing homes should take in hot weather.

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Federal regulations do not require air conditioning, but they do require nursing homes to provide a safe, functional, sanitary and comfortable environment for the residents, staff and public. Newer facilities (those initially certified after 10/1/90) are required to maintain a temperature range of 71-81 degrees Fahrenheit. During rare, brief episodes of unseasonably hot weather, nursing homes in the most northern states are allowed to have temperatures exceeding 81 degrees, as long as resident health and safety are not adversely affected.

Over the past year, DPH attempted to document the quality and quantity of air conditioning in state nursing homes thru a self-reported, online and telephone survey. It was found that all of Connecticut's 240 licensed nursing homes have some form of air conditioning, but about one-third don't have it in every room, and 25 don't provide it in any resident rooms. Fifty homes cited the older design and electrical system of their facility as a reason for not being fully air-conditioned. It is estimated that the average Connecticut nursing home is about 40 years old. Cost will certainly be a factor if all nursing homes are to install air conditioning in every resident room.

Senate Bill 620: An Act Concerning a Plan to Encourage "Aging in Place"

~ CoA Informs

Like you, the CoA is committed to helping individuals age in place; in fact, this has been the core of our work for the past 17 years. We lead such efforts in part through our role as co-chair the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee and co-chair and manager of the legislatively mandated Long-Term Care Advisory Council (CGS §17b-338). The Advisory Council is composed of consumers, providers, advocates and independent state entities and meets about nine times annually to discuss ongoing state efforts in the area of long-term care.

In addition, the Advisory Council collaborates with the Long-Term Care Planning Committee to develop a comprehensive statewide Long-Term Care Plan every three years. The Planning Committee (CGS §17b-337) is composed of designees from a variety of state agencies and is currently chaired by OPM. The most recent Plan, released in January 2010, is titled "*Balancing the System: Working Toward Real Choice in the Long-Term Care System.*" The plan continues to address the development and maintenance of a consumer-driven system of long-term services and support across the lifespan and across all disabilities with the focus on informed choice, least restrictive and most appropriate setting, and community inclusion.

Additionally, in 2006 and 2007, the CGA mandated and funded – while the CoA oversaw – a LTC Needs Assessment, conducted by UConn Health Center, Center on Aging which was exceedingly comprehensive with multiple components, wide ranging issues, and a series of recommendations.

Therefore, we respectfully believe that the creation of a new task force to conduct this same type of work is not necessary at this time. The issue of helping people age in place has been well studied both in Connecticut and across the nation, and we are armed with a series of data-driven recommendations specific to our state. One alternative to the current proposal is to modify the authorizing statute for the Planning Committee to require implementation of the Plan, including a timeline. We would be most pleased to continue to work with this Committee and other policymakers to help realize the implementation of the Plan and other recommendations around aging in place.